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SUBJECT: FINNISH COMMENTS ON NOV 3 GYMNICHE AND NOV 10-11
GAERC

REF: STATE 115017

Classified By: PolChief Scott Brandon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) PolChief met on October 31 with Leena-Kaisa Mikkola, Director of the MFA Unit for European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy, to discuss the upcoming Gymnich and GAERC meetings.

¶2. (C) Mikkola said the subject of the November 3 Gymnich would be Transatlantic Relations, i.e., as a change in government in the U.S. approaches EU ministers will discuss what issues should be on the transatlantic agenda. Subjects on the agenda are the Russia, the Middle East, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and "multilateral cooperation" (Mikkola was unclear what the last would cover).

- RUSSIA: The GoF does not think it beneficial to continue to postpone negotiations with Russia on a new EU-Russia partnership agreement. Continuing postponement might mean the EU loses the possibility to influence Russia, with the result that key Member States (MSs) will exert more influence bilaterally. Mikkola noted that other MSs disagree with that position, some of whom are "quite close" (likely a reference to Estonia). Regarding President Medvedev's proposal for a new European Security Treaty, Mikkola said that the subject might be raised at Gymnich or GAERC. This issue is "problematic," as Medvedev raised it with the EU before the Georgia conflict; subsequently it came under a different light and now the EU is unsure how to respond. Mikkola said the GoF has only started to consider the matter, and noted that within the government and among MS there is a difference of opinion. Describing it as an interesting option, Mikkola vaguely mentioned a comment by President Sarkozy about the OSCE as a possible forum for this matter,

- MIDDLE EAST: Mikkola said the EU hopes that the new U.S. Administration will lose no time in getting involved in the Israel/Palestine peace process. Mikkola added that the EU will "do its share" and referred broadly to existing financial assistance and security initiatives, with additional measures under discussion. Mikkola said that it would be useful for the EU to show support now for deeper cooperation with Israel, working with Livni, because cooperation could be harder to deepen under a Netanyahu-led government. Regarding Iran, the GoF supports new autonomous measures that go beyond existing UNSCRs and existing EU policy. Mikkola said there is no consensus in the Council on this, but perhaps it might be reached "little by little." On the nonpaper's points on Syria, Mikkola saw no problems on the Finnish side, for the most part: regarding progress on the EU-Syria Association Agreement, Mikkola said the GoF would like to see more progress on this, using the agreement as a carrot to encourage a more constructive role.

- AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN: Mikkola is unsure what will be

proposed in the Gymnich meeting (foreign and defense ministers would discuss the EU's role crisis management initiatives, while separately development ministers would discuss assistance). She said that "real transatlantic cooperation" is necessary between the EU and U.S. on this matter, and added that she saw no problems with the U.S. points raised.

¶3. (C) In the November 10 Council meeting Mikkola expected the main topics would be EU-Russia relations, events in the Congo and the Western Balkans. Regarding the Congo, a possible EU crisis management operation is a "tricky issue"; Mikkola says there are some in the EU who have voiced support for use of the EU Battle Group - no GoF position yet. The main question for the Western Balkans discussion is what to do with the military crisis management operation in Bosnia, i.e., should it be reduced or ended. The Finnish position is that EUFOR/Althea should wind down to an end sooner rather than later, as military forces are better used elsewhere and police can fill the gaps in Bosnia; Mikkola noted that other MS support a continued military presence in Bosnia. Additional topics for the Council will be Iraq and Burma. On Iraq, Mikkola lamented the likelihood of limited debate on Iraq, saying that it is too seldom a topic of discussion. Regarding Burma, Mikkola expects nothing dramatic, simply a reminder to the Burmese government that the EU follows events there and supports the UN's efforts.

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